

(Washington, DC) Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) made the following statement in commemoration of LGBT History Month, which is observed each October, in conjunction with National Coming Out Day, to recognize the many contributions and ongoing struggle for equal rights of our nation's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community:

"I am proud to join the nation in celebrating the start of LGBT History Month and recognizing National Coming Out Day on October 11, 2012. It is because of courageous individuals like Rodney Wilson, the Missouri high school teacher who created LGBT History Month in 1994, that the next generation of leaders and citizens will be able to build upon the hard work and sacrifice of all those who have dedicated their lives to achieving true equality for all Americans. From the classroom to public office to the world of professional sports, I am truly inspired to see so many Americans of all ages come out openly as LGBT or come out in support of their LGBT family members and friends.

"Step by step, we continue to advance the rights of LGBT individuals and their families. Just recently, the Department of Homeland Security announced that it would issue written guidance clarifying that LGBT family ties would be recognized in immigration cases. In addition, our nation celebrated on September 20th the one-year anniversary of the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' which stands as a testament to our brave men and women in uniform and our military's commitment to honor, integrity, and equality.

"While we celebrate these victories, however, I am sadly aware of the great injustice and discrimination that LGBT Americans continue to face on a daily basis. In many states all across the country, committed same-sex couples lack the legal protections and benefits of marriage; it remains legal to fire workers based solely on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression; and students are afraid to be themselves at school. That is why we must redouble our efforts to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), and enact effective anti-bullying legislation. In addition, we must address issues that impact the well-being and financial security of LGBT Americans, such as equal access to family and medical leave, credit, and tax benefits.

"This LGBT History Month, I encourage my colleagues in Congress and all Americans to take the opportunity to reflect on the human rights pioneers who have led us to where we are today. It is my sincere hope that, together, we will continue to turn the pages of history forward on LGBT equality in this country."

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings serves as Senior Member of the House Rules Committee, Ranking Democratic Member of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, and Democratic Chairman of the Florida Delegation.

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